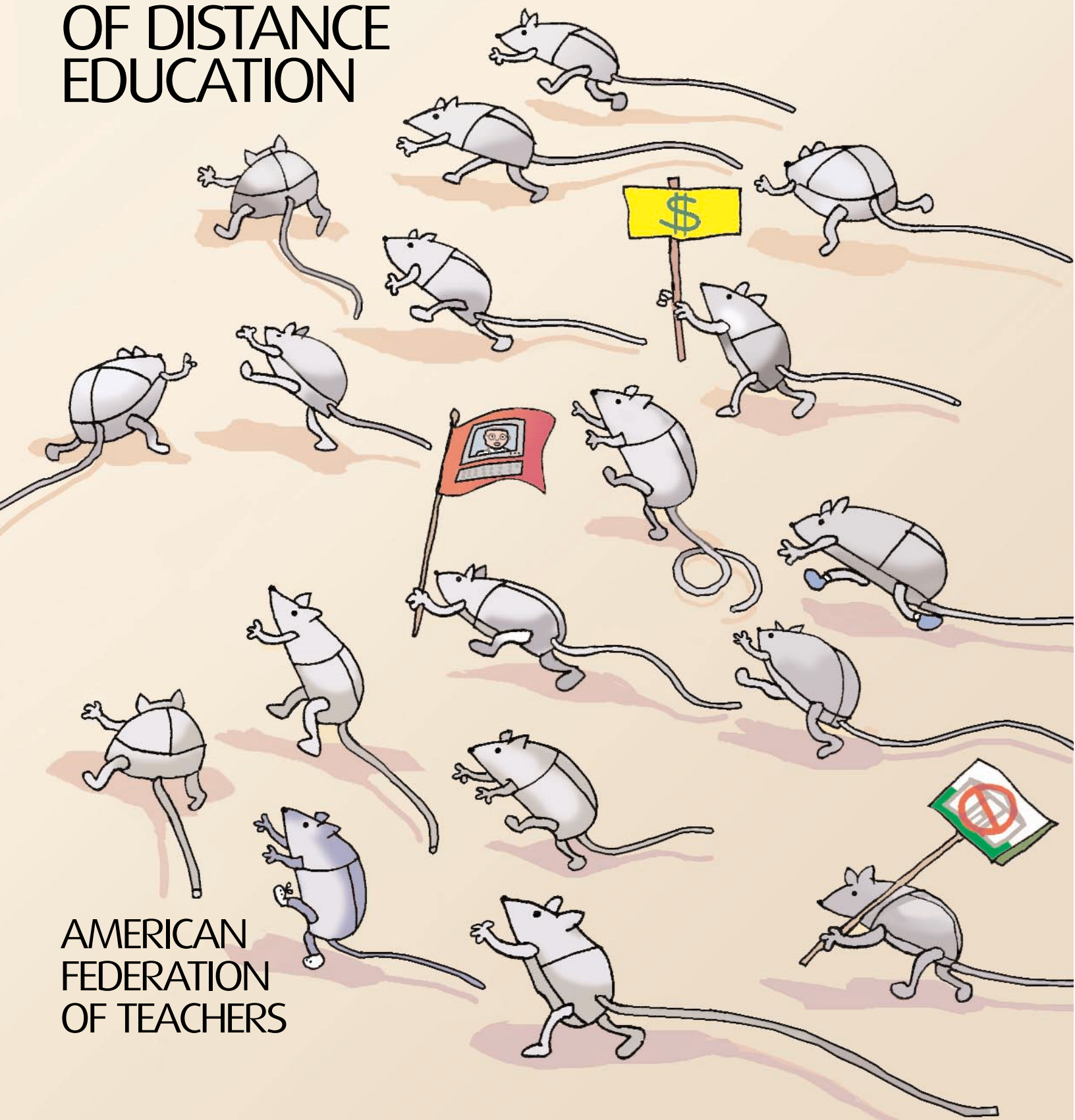
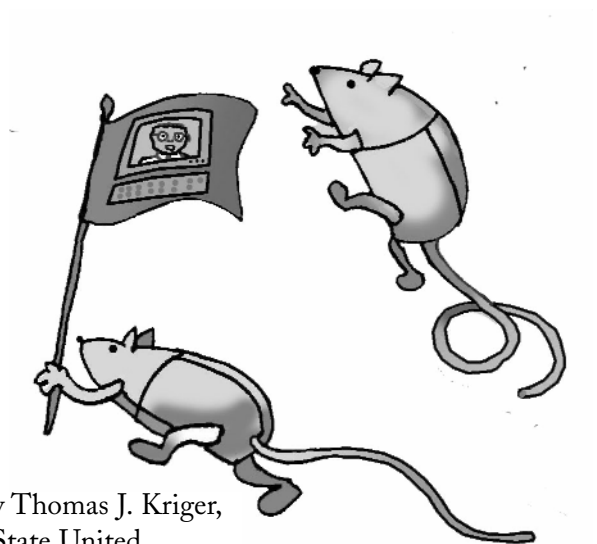


A VIRTUAL REVOLUTION: TRENDS IN THE EXPANSION OF DISTANCE EDUCATION



AMERICAN
FEDERATION
OF TEACHERS

A VIRTUAL REVOLUTION: TRENDS IN THE EXPANSION OF DISTANCE EDUCATION



The research for this report, as well as most of the text, was prepared by Thomas J. Kriger, Research Director, United University Professions (SUNY)/ New York State United Teachers/American Federation of Teachers/American Association of University Professors. We are grateful for his participation.

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STAFF

Lawrence Gold, *AFT Higher Education Director*

Perry Robinson, *AFT Higher Education Deputy Director*

Craig Smith, *AFT Higher Education Assistant Director*

Executive Summary

The expansion of distance education (DE) is leading a virtual revolution in American higher education. The question is whether or not that revolution will improve the quality of education students receive. Based on a review of the latest trends in organizing distance education, this report finds that distance education can be a great asset as long as academic decision-making is placed in the hands of teaching professionals. However, serious problems arise if DE is organized primarily around corporate models of marketing and command-and-control management.

A variety of studies chart the growth of U.S. colleges and universities offering some coursework, if not whole programs, via distance. Those studies also indicate steadily rising distance education enrollments, particularly in Internet-based coursework. College administrators and public officials cite a number of reasons for the expansion of distance education: projected enrollment growth, shrinking public funding for higher education, student demand and the need to improve access for non-traditional students. Academic supporters, including faculty teaching DE courses, are attracted to the challenge of providing quality education in a new medium.

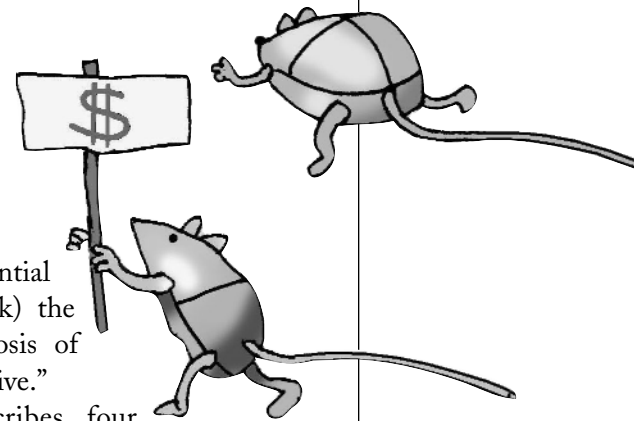
While all these motivations are legitimate, there is also clearly another motivation and that is the perceived potential for profit. Numerous projections coming from both government agencies and business analysts suggest that the potential market for distance education can be measured in the billions of dollars. As a result, according to Professor Dan Schiller of University of California-San

Diego, there is potential for “the Net (to kick) the ongoing metamorphosis of education into overdrive.”

This report describes four major trends leading the growth of distance education. The purpose is not to cover every provider but to draw a picture of the types of organizational structures and educational activities that are on the rise. These include:

- **Existing higher education institutions that have or are developing distance education programs**, such as e-Cornell, NYU Online, the University of Illinois On-line; University of Maryland University College, Rio Salado Community College, the SUNY Learning Network and Virtual Temple;
- **Corporate-university joint ventures**: those that provide course management systems such as Blackboard, Campus Pipeline, eCollege and Web CT, as well as those who package and distribute courses or content from existing institutions such as UNext.com, Cenquest, Fathom, Global Education Network, Quisic and Universitas 21;
- **Full virtual universities**, such as the University of Phoenix Online, Western Governors University, Andrew Jackson University, Cappella University, Jones International University, Kennedy-Warren University;
- **Corporate university or training institutions**, such as the members of Corporate University Xchange and Click2learn.

What do we learn from these descriptions? First,



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we learn that the variety of new ways to organize DE and reach new students is enormous, as is the talent that can be brought to bear in making education attractive in the new medium. But we also find that *the way distance education is being organized and conducted* often poses serious questions.

Much of the distance education under study here, whether non-profit or for-profit, is built on corporate ideas about consumer focus, product standardization, tight personnel control and cost effectiveness (maximizing course taking while minimizing the “inputs” of faculty and development time). These concepts are contrary to the traditional model of higher education decision-making which emphasizes faculty independence in teaching and research, academic control of the curriculum, academic freedom in the classroom and collegial decision-making.

While traditional practices are not sacrosanct, academic decision making processes have been very successful in producing quality higher education—the best in the world. Our concern is that some of the new trends and practices described in this report may inhibit rather than promote good education. A number of specific concerns arose:

- Education based primarily on the marketplace and the model of “student as customer” is too narrow. Student and industry preferences certainly matter in designing curricula, but if pleasing the customer is the *pre-eminent* value, there is a real danger that the curriculum will not be coherent, rigorous enough or broad enough to meet the student’s long-term interests.
- It is appropriate, indeed essential, to present information for the DE marketplace in an attractive, computer-friendly fashion. But over-attention to drawing “customers” may result in technology driving the way teaching is conducted—leading, for example, to models centered around bite-size, “point and click” accumulations of facts rather than a more reflective, less easily measured search for knowledge.
- A central characteristic of many DE providers is to “unbundle” the faculty role so that different specialists develop the curriculum, teach the course, evaluate student performance, etc. This

allows for greater standardization but it may not add up to better education.

- Standardization of coursework also inhibits students from being exposed to the diverse views of different faculty members with varying knowledge and perspectives. This diversity is important in enabling students to hone their own ideas and knowledge.
- Some programs exhibited an inclination to increase class size as a means of increasing the financial output of a course. The only proper consideration in fixing class size is to maintain the best level to facilitate learning.
- Some programs rely too heavily on testing for individual “outcomes” and “competencies” while downgrading the importance of class time and social interaction in developing deep knowledge about a subject. Along the same lines, distance education providers too often dismiss the importance of same-time same-place interaction rather than building it into their programs whenever possible.

In the year 2000, AFT published *Distance Education: Guidelines for Good Practice*. The guidelines lay out 14 specific standards which, if observed, ensure high quality distance education. (A synopsis of the guidelines appears in the report’s conclusion.) The guidelines advance AFT’s belief that broad academic content, high standards, personal interaction and professional control are the key elements of educational quality. College faculty must insist on sound practice based on a broad vision of education—one that recognizes education is about more than facts, more than competencies, more than career ambitions.

Education, among other things, is about broadening intellectual horizons, relying on facts and reason when confronting life issues and learning to listen to others and defend ideas by the force of argument. That is why education is the foundation of a working democracy. Because distance education is ubiquitous and offers so much promise, faculty are obligated to carry the banner for quality and good practice while recognizing that this will sometimes require challenging current trends and practices.

Introduction

The expansion of distance education

American higher education is in the midst of a virtual revolution. In the 1980s, advances in microcomputing revolutionized academic data collection and analysis alike and gave rise to the Internet as a means for academic researchers to share data. In the 1990s, we saw the extraordinary growth of distance education (DE) in higher education, particularly Internet-based courses at the collegiate level. These include both credit and non-credit courses, even full degree programs, and the numbers continue to rise.

According to a report by International Data Corporation, in 2002 approximately 85 percent of two- and four-year colleges will offer distance education courses, up from 62 percent in 1998. For the same time period, student enrollments are projected to increase from just over 500,000 to well over two million students.¹

What is causing this expansion? For one thing, college administrators often report that they are responding to the likelihood of large enrollment increases coupled with shrinking public budgets and, in particular, the disinclination of public officials to build new brick-and-mortar institutions. Another motivation is the desire to provide educational access to students who are unable, or find it extremely inconvenient, to attend a tradi-

tional institution.

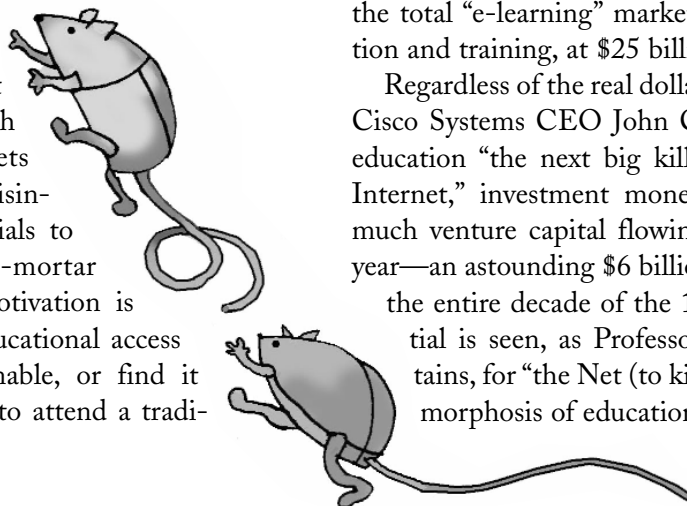
Academic supporters of distance education are attracted to the challenge of providing quality education through a new medium. Some advocates maintain that student demand is an important reason for the growth of distance education, although there is mixed evidence on that point. Another likely factor in the growth of distance education is the general cultural shift toward digital communications.

Clearly, however, one critical component of the expansion of distance education is the perception that it offers the potential for making big money. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, education and training accounted for \$700 billion a year in the American economy, with distance education grabbing an increasing slice of the education pie.² The potential market for distance education seems to grow with each new estimate. According to one report, Merrill Lynch projected that the distance education market would reach \$7 billion by 2003.³ A report by Thomas Wiesel Partners put the number at \$10 billion in 2003, and another report by Merrill Lynch forecast the total "e-learning" market, including all education and training, at \$25 billion by 2003.⁴

Regardless of the real dollar value, in 1999, when Cisco Systems CEO John Chambers pronounced education "the next big killer application on the Internet," investment money poured in, with as much venture capital flowing into education that year—an astounding \$6 billion—as was invested in the entire decade of the 1990s.⁵ Thus, a potential is seen, as Professor Dan Schiller maintains, for "the Net (to kick) the ongoing metamorphosis of education into overdrive."⁶

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There is a tendency toward the apocalyptic when discussing distance education, both in the minds of those who see DE as saving education and those who see it as the downfall of our once great system. Here is one example: In 1997, Coopers and Lybrand brought together a group of 35 leaders of corporations and education institutions to discuss the effects of the Internet on higher education. In what was presented as “a message to today’s higher education leaders,” the ensuing report claimed that “the academy needs to be prepared for major upheaval” and “structural change.” The report offered the transformation of the health care industry in the 1990s as a fitting analogy for the changes required in higher education. The document outlined how health care had moved from a growth industry subsidized by federal dollars with physicians making the major decisions, to an industry that has been consolidated and drastically reduced its costs, with large purchasers (some for-profit) driving the marketplace and setting performance standards while physicians now answer to HMOs.

Thus what was needed in higher education was something like an EMO (an educational maintenance organization) that would have the function of reducing costs and limiting the decision-making power of individual faculty members. As the report explained:

Faculty members could answer to HMO-like entities. Corporations could buy education on behalf of their employees and their families from knowledge companies that operate very much like HMOs. The HMOs would contract with content providers (in this case faculty members) and distribute the education they provide.⁷

Can there be a better argument for faculty activism?

The purpose of this report

This report is designed to inform AFT members and other interested parties about the nature of the expansion of distance education and the major trends that have resulted from its implementation. The report offers a wide-angle snapshot of the terrain of distance education—examining growth in both the quantity and variety of electronic coursework as well as the emergence of a new array of “providers” who are seeking a niche in this ever-changing education marketplace.

After reviewing these trends, the report analyzes quality issues such as faculty control over the curriculum, class size and the role of same-time, same-

place interchange in undergraduate education. These issues are discussed in the context of *Distance Education: Guidelines for Good Practice*, an AFT publication that summarizes the principles and practices we consider necessary to good DE programming.

We hope this report helps faculty members come to grips with the nature and dimensions of the expansion in distance education. This is important because faculty must work hard and speak clearly, both as experts and as advocates, at their own institutions and in public forums, to ensure that sensible, academically responsible standards of quality will prevail in distance education.

Major Trends in Distance Education

Here we examine the transformation of higher education from the perspective of the many new DE providers—both for-profit and not-for-profit—that have been created in the past few years. We move through four categories. The first highlights existing higher education institutions that have or are developing distance education programs. The second describes joint corporate-university models. The third deals with fully virtual universities, and the final category discusses the corporate training arena.

Category 1: Existing Institutions

Some college administrators explain their adoption of DE in terms of gaining access to new student populations. Others cite competitive pressure to maintain existing enrollments vis-a-vis for-profit distance education providers and other existing institutions. Among elite colleges, there is the desire to protect the quality of their “brand” name and still fall in line behind the DE bandwagon. At some institutions, DE initiatives are pitched as a way to keep faculty members from selling their courses to other vendors. In a recent highly publicized case, Harvard took steps to prevent one of its well-known law school faculty members, Arthur Miller, from selling a set of Internet lectures to the Concord University School of Law—an online law school.⁸

One example of a university that has created a

significant online program is the University of Illinois. Established in 1997, the **University of Illinois Online** (Table 1) currently enrolls students in 26 online programs, including one professional degree, 10 complete master’s degrees, and a baccalaureate completion program. The U of I Online does not separately admit and register students; instead, it coordinates the university’s online offerings and provides research and student services for online learning.

Similarly, the **State University of New York (SUNY) Learning Network** (Table 1) is another large DE consortium, offering graduate, undergraduate and non-credit courses from 53 SUNY campuses. Like Illinois Online, the SUNY Learning Network does not offer separate degrees; each degree comes from an individual SUNY campus.

Faculty participation in the program is voluntary. Courses listed in the SUNY Learning Network catalog are approved through regular channels on each SUNY campus.

Rio Salado Community College (Table 1) offers one of the largest distance education programs at the community college level. One of 10 separate institutions in the huge (9,000-plus square miles) Maricopa Community College District in the greater Phoenix area, Rio Salado was founded in 1978 as a center for adult education. With no central campus, this self-described “college without

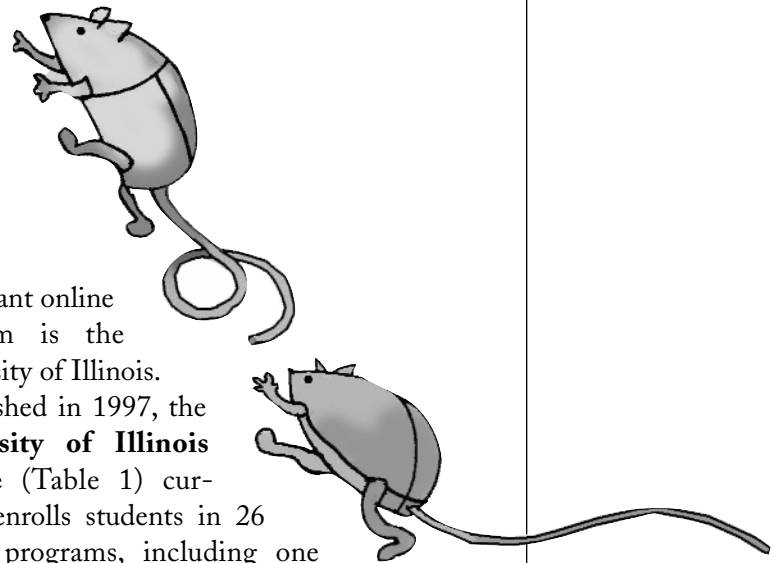


Table 1

A Sampling of Colleges and Universities that Offer Online/Distance Education Programs

Institution	Characteristics	Number and Type of DE Programs	DE Enrollment	Accreditation
e-Cornell	For-profit spin off; no courses offered yet	Will offer certificates, not degree programs	NA	Not accredited as a separate entity
NYU Online	For-profit spin off primarily for corporate market	Two graduate; many corporate programs	166 (in graduate programs)*	Not accredited as a separate entity
University of Illinois Online	Umbrella organization for different U. of Illinois campuses	One professional degree; 10 master's; bachelor's completion program	6,000 courses taken online	North Central
University of Maryland University College	Claims online program is world's largest online university	14 bachelor; 10 graduate	7,955;* UMUC now claims enrollment of 40,000	Middle States
Rio Salado Community College	One of the first and largest online community college programs	Six associate degree; 12 certificate	200 online courses; 8,000 students per semester	North Central
SUNY Learning Network	One of the three largest DE programs in the country (with Phoenix and UMUC)	1,500 courses from accounting to Web design	Approximately 10,000 course enrollments per semester	Middle States
Virtual Temple	For-profit spin off; no courses offered yet	NA	NA	Not accredited as a separate entity

* Figures for 1999-2000, US Department of Education, *Report to Congress on the Distance Education Demonstration Programs*, January 2001. Other statistics reported directly by institutions.

boundaries" originally offered courses in high schools, libraries and community centers in the Phoenix area. In 1996, Rio Salado began to add online programs to its extensive menu of distance learning courses and training programs. Today, Rio Salado delivers 80 percent of its general education courses via the Internet or other DE technologies. New course selections at Rio begin every two weeks and students can study at their own pace, which offers flexibility for working adults.⁹ Rio Salado employs 18 full-time faculty and 600 part-timers, and every faculty member is required to teach at least one online course.

The faculty role at Rio Salado is "unbundled," or broken down into a series of discrete tasks. Design teams—which include a technical trainer, an editor, a proofreader, and Web and content specialists—create a curriculum and standardized courses that are taught primarily by adjunct faculty.

Rio Salado College is one of a handful of U.S. institutions that participate in the Pew Learning

and Technology Program's Grant Program in Course Redesign. This program was based upon ideas found in the National Learning Infrastructure Initiative, in which modular, online exercises, tutorials and quizzes would replace more expensive direct contact with actual faculty in high enrollment introductory courses.¹⁰

According to Carol Twigg, coordinator of the Pew program, such redesigned introductory courses should enhance the quality of education by individualizing the instruction, assessing students' learning more frequently and providing students with more specific feedback. The "primary goal" of the program is "to shift from a passive, note-taking role to an active learning orientation in order to enhance learning outcomes." The "significant cost savings" generated by the course redesign could then be used to reduce tuition, or be given to "faculty members involved in the redesign...as an incentive or a reward for increasing productivity."

At Rio Salado, Introductory Algebra was select-

ed for redesign, which had the third highest enrollment of the top 25 courses in the entire community college district. Course content was delivered via interactive software. The restructuring increased the student faculty ratio from 35 to 100 students per instructor, although each faculty member was assigned teaching assistants to help with technology questions and students had access to a help desk.¹¹

In a few cases, universities have created for-profit spinoffs for their distance education programs. One reason for the switch to for-profit status is access to capital. Recent estimates place the cost of infrastructure needed for colleges to offer online courses at \$25 million. Moreover, even though many universities have attempted to limit the amount of money spent on distance education infrastructure and courses, some private, for-profit companies have spent at least \$1 million to develop a single course. Thus, with colleges and universities embarking on a kind of educational arms race, some institutions have sought significant outside funding in order to launch new distance education programs.¹²

The first for-profit online subsidiary was created in 1998 at New York University. The curriculum at **NYU Online** (Table 1) is marketed to corporate clients such as American Express and Morgan Stanley Dean Witter. At first, NYU contracted with Click2learn (see Category 4, Corporate Universities, on Page 17), a company that provides the technical expertise and software necessary for DE courses.

More recently, the institution has developed its own facilities for producing and marketing distance education. Some instructors at NYU Online are drawn from NYU's tenured faculty; others are adjuncts. Teaching is broken down into a series of discrete steps. One professor designs a course, instructional designers set up the course online, and another instructor teaches the course, in some cases, replying to students in real-time chat sessions.¹³

When asked whether this process compromises faculty control over the curriculum, Ron Chalmers, NYU Online's director of academic operations, replied that it did not. There were, he said, some accommodations that faculty must make when using the DE medium. Their favorite 15-minute lecture, for example, could not be condensed into a text box in a DE template that was limited to 256 characters. In this case, faculty would have to

improvise when converting traditional courses to distance education. But Chalmers was quick to point out that faculty participation in NYU Online is voluntary and that when courses were developed for distance education, faculty were always the final authority. He argued further that new DE course software would allow professors—who have a basic knowledge of computers and half a day of training—to perform all the functions of a DE design team, thus making the disaggregation of the teaching functions unnecessary.¹⁴

The first *public* university in the United States to create a for-profit DE spinoff is the University of Maryland, which established the **University of Maryland University College** online program in 1999 (Table 1). At UMUC, students worldwide have access to 24 complete bachelor's and master's degree programs. With an enrollment of 40,000, UMUC bills itself as the world's largest online university. UMUC was created with private sector investment, in part the result of a Maryland law, since repealed, that required distance education organizations to be self-supporting. In the last five years, however, UMUC has received approximately \$40 million in state support.¹⁵

Other for-profit spinoffs are still in the pipeline. Temple University has announced plans for a **"Virtual Temple,"** and Cornell University trustees have approved a resolution for an **"e-Cornell"** (Table 1). To date, neither of these online programs has begun to offer courses; and both of these programs engendered considerable faculty opposition on their respective campuses. At Temple, the faculty senate passed several resolutions related to Virtual Temple. One requested that any course offered online be approved by the university's faculty senate—the same process used for on-campus courses. Art Hochner, president of the AFT local at Temple, noted that the faculty had a variety of concerns regarding Virtual Temple. One concern was a lack of faculty involvement; another was that Virtual Temple courses would be taught by "poorly paid part-timers" instead of full-time faculty members.¹⁶

Category 2: Corporate-University Joint Ventures

The second category of new distance education providers consists of corporate-university joint ventures. These hybrid partnerships can be further divided into two subcategories:

- Those that provide *course management systems* for colleges and universities to offer their own DE courses and programs, and
- Those that *package and distribute courses* or content from existing institutions.¹⁷

Course management systems: When colleges choose to offer distance education, administrators must choose from several options. One is to develop their own hardware and software to offer DE in-house. Another option is to develop some of the capabilities for DE, which might include the software templates for DE courses, for example, while contracting out for the hardware and training necessary to host full-scale DE programs. A third option is to contract with outside vendors. This group of vendors is noteworthy because distance education is expanding most rapidly through existing institutions adding distance courses to the established curriculum. The outside vendors who provide hardware, and, most important, course management software, are consequently tapping the largest market.

Web CT is the leader in this understandably lucrative market, (Table 2), which provides a variety of software, course tools and hosting solutions to more than 2,600 college and university clients. Web CT currently serves more students and faculty than the next largest vendor, **Blackboard** (Table 2). Blackboard is the fastest growing firm in this sector with more than 1,900 colleges and universities as clients, including such well-known institu-

tions as Johns Hopkins, Duke and the Ivy League schools. Blackboard has raised more than \$50 million with backing from America Online, Dell Computer and Pearson Education. In December 2000, the U.S. Army announced that Blackboard had been selected for a \$435 million DE program for soldiers.

Other vendors in this sector include **Campus Pipeline** (Table 2), based in Salt Lake City, which provides campus Web platforms for more than 65 colleges and universities, and **eCollege** (Table 2), which provides DE hosting capability on a number of campuses.

The firm most likely to dominate this market will be the one that can successfully integrate DE course management with student information systems; this would allow students to register for courses, check their grades and attend DE classes—all from the same computer screen.

Likewise, faculty members could grade student papers, check their transcripts and track their enrollment, using the same computer interface. It is little wonder that one DE administrator described this as the “holy grail” for private course-management vendors.

In May 2000, Web CT took an important step toward reaching this goal. It joined with Campus Pipeline and SCT, a company that provides more than 1,000 higher education student information systems, to create an alliance that could “deliver a full range of administrative services, campus intranet offerings, distance learning resources,

Table 2
Corporate-University Joint Ventures:
Course Management System Vendors

Institution	Characteristics	Number and Type of DE Programs	Affiliations	Accreditation
Blackboard	Software for online “learning environments”	NA	Used by more than 1,900 institutions, according to estimates	NA
Campus Pipeline	Provides Web platform for higher education	NA	List of nearly 600 campus licensees	NA
eCollege	Provides online campuses for universities; competes with Blackboard, Web CT	NA	Clients include Univ. of Colorado, Johns Hopkins, Seton Hall, DeVry	NA
Web CT	Provides campuses platform for DE	NA	Estimated in use at 2,600 institutions	NA

community tools and Internet content from a single login.”¹⁸

Package and distribution systems: The second category of corporate-university joint ventures comprises vendors that package and distribute courses or educational content from existing institutions. One of the most ambitious of these new DE joint ventures is **Fathom** (Table 3), Columbia University’s for-profit DE consortium. Fathom does not offer degrees or administer individual courses, but instead acts as a distribution channel for its 13 prestigious member institutions and other colleges and universities whose courses have been added more recently. These include the University of Chicago, the Rand Corporation, the American Film Institute, the London School of Economics, the Smithsonian, the British Museum and the New York Public Library. Recently, Fathom has begun to list courses from the University of Washington, University of Florida, the University of Buffalo, Iowa State University and the University of Southern California School of Engineering among the 600 courses on its Web site.

Fathom markets itself as the source of high-quality DE content. For quality control, Fathom relies on two separate groups. The first group, which includes faculty and administrators from Columbia University Teachers College, approves all courses offered on the Fathom Web site. In addition, an academic advisory council composed of one representative from each of the 13 member institutions oversees other educational content on the Web site. Ann Kirschner, Fathom’s CEO, says the consortium currently is developing a number of short courses and seminars that fall between the two poles of individual lectures and semester-long courses. Fathom is also developing humanities courses, which is rare among the new, mostly business-oriented DE providers.

There is also a great deal of free content on the Fathom Web site, which Kirschner says, has two purposes. The first is to project the teaching and research mission of Fathom’s member institutions. The second is to provide an entry point for people who are curious about distance education but not willing to sign up for a full semester course. The obvious question is whether Fathom can develop a market for high-end (and high-brow) intellectual content delivered via the Internet.

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, Fathom has “about 75,000 registered users,” while the number of students actually paying for online courses num-

bers “only in the hundreds.”

According to a draft report by the Columbia University senate, Fathom has yet to make a profit. The report noted that Columbia recently was forced to commit \$10 million—on top of its original investment of \$20 million—to keep the consortium afloat. In the meantime, Fathom has postponed advertising and laid off staff. According to Kirschner, Fathom’s lack of profitability reflects the fact that DE has yet to be fully integrated into higher education. Until that happens, she maintains, Fathom must work on adding more courses and “evangelizing” for distance education.¹⁹

Cardean University (Table 3) The online subsidiary of UNext.com, is a fully accredited, online, graduate business school. Backed by former junk bond king Michael Milken and Oracle CEO Larry Ellison, Cardean is affiliated with prestigious MBA programs at Columbia, Stanford, Carnegie Mellon and the London School of Economics. The University of Chicago, has an especially strong influence, John Gould, former dean of Chicago’s business school is Cardean’s president and Andrew Rosenfield, a professor at Chicago, is president of UNext.com. A degree from Cardean, however, is separate from any of the affiliated institutions, which raises the question of whether business school students will flock to this less well-known (and not yet regionally accredited) “brand” name.

Cardean is promoted as a high-quality, comprehensive program for business professionals, and most of its nearly 100 courses are marketed to companies for in-house training. Cardean is also very well funded. UNext reportedly spent \$1 million developing the institution’s first four courses and has committed \$120 million for Cardean’s first three years of operation. In case Cardean were to fold, UNext’s Rosenfield reportedly offered each partner institution a guarantee of \$20 million in exchange for their affiliation. But given Cardean’s strong backing and institutional pedigree, many well known businesses have signed on. By the end of 2000, 14 major companies had signed up for Cardean to provide distance education to their employees, and more were in the pipeline.²⁰

Cardean’s curriculum is based upon the idea of “problem-centered learning.” Cardean students are presented with distance education simulations of crises they might confront in the corporate world.

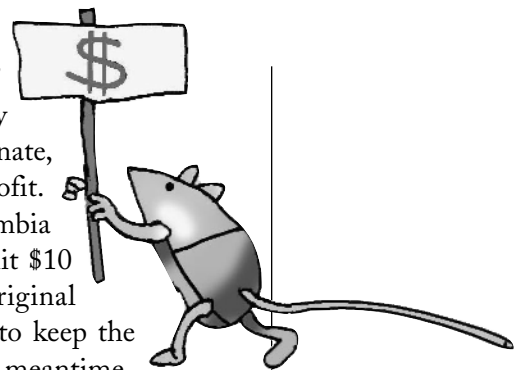


Table 3**Corporate-University Joint Ventures:
Hybrid Course or Content Providers**

Institution	Characteristics	Number & Type of DE Programs	Affiliations	Accreditation
Cardean University/ UNext.com	Creates courses in collaboration with prestigious business schools; problem-solving based curriculum	MBA program and 80 courses offered	Columbia, Chicago, Stanford, Carnegie Mellon, and the London School of Economics	DETC
Cenquest	Offers graduate business degrees and training	1 certificate 2 masters' program	Partnered with Babson, U. of Texas, Oregon Institute, Adelaide University, Monterrey Institute of Technology	No
Fathom	Columbia's for-profit spin-off; niche is to provide high-quality content; courses to include arts and humanities	600 courses listed; 75,000 registered users; several hundred students enrolled in online courses	13 member institutions including Univ. Of Chicago, American Film Institute, London School of Economics, NY Public Library	No
Global Education Network	Brainchild of Williams professor Mark Taylor and investment banker Herbert Allen; trying to attract faculty with star power; will offer core curriculum including arts and humanities	3 or 4 courses currently in development; no degree programs available	Courses by individual faculty from Williams, Wellesley, Brown, Amherst, Yale	Seeking accreditation
Quisic (formerly University Access)	Offers undergraduate, graduate business courses, training; original focus undergraduate DE	Clients include Cisco, United, Citigroup, Lexus, IBM	200 corporate clients; university partners include Dartmouth, London School of Economics, North Carolina, USC	No
Universitas 21	Global network of 18 institutions worldwide; joint venture with Thomson Learning	In planning stages	Seeking U.S. institutional participants	No

Beginning with specialized business courses in the summer of 1999, today Cardean offers a complete online MBA and a total menu of almost 100 courses. Masters courses, which require 25 to 30 hours, cost \$500 each. Shorter quantum courses, each requiring two to three hours, are priced at five for \$380. Teaching at Cardean is unbundled, with "senior" faculty planning the curriculum, "advisory" faculty counseling students and supervising ad-

juncts, and "adjunct" faculty members working with students by grading assignments, answering e-mail and directing online discussions.

Another ambitious online joint venture is **Global Education Network** (GEN) (Table 3), the product of an alliance between Williams College humanities professor Mark Taylor and investment banker Herbert Alan Jr. As with Fathom, GEN is one of the few for-profit DE providers committed

to bringing the “soft” subjects of the humanities online. GEN, in fact, plans to offer a full undergraduate core curriculum in a few years, with faculty drawn from small, prestigious liberal arts colleges, which are not usually associated with distance education. Not surprisingly, GEN markets itself as a high-quality DE access point; currently on the Web site are courses from individual faculty at Williams, Wellesley and Brown. The privately owned GEN reportedly has institutional relationships with Wellesley, Brown and Duke, although many other institutions—including Williams (Taylor’s home campus) have chosen not to affiliate with GEN. The main objection at Williams was that associating with a DE provider would hurt its quality reputation.²¹

Other distance education joint ventures—some with significant outside funding—are attempting to capture the estimated \$4 billion that corporations spend each year on DE training for their employees.²² Founded in 1997, **Cenquest** (Table 3) offers business courses and graduate degree programs in partnership with a number of university MBA programs. Cenquest’s original affiliates were the Oregon Graduate Institute of Science and Technology and the University of Texas at Austin.

Working with these institutions, Cenquest adapts their courses for the DE market by dividing them into shorter units, which are then offered on a rolling schedule either for individual applications or degree and certificate programs such as accounting, which are more readily standardized and modularized. In December 2000, Cenquest affiliated with the prestigious Babson College to provide an MBA program to Intel employees. Cenquest has been successful in attracting venture capital. It began offering DE courses, which now number over 100, in 1998.

A similarly well-funded DE provider (\$55 million) is **Quisic** (Table 3), which is partnered with the London School of Economics, University of Southern California’s Marshall School of Business, and Financial Times Knowledge, a business education provider. Formerly known as University Access, Quisic has moved beyond its original focus in the undergraduate DE market and today is primarily concerned with business education and training. Quisic has been aggressive in expanding its market of more than 200 corporate clients. Also organized for the overseas DE market is **Universitas 21** (Table 3), a consortium of 18 institutions of higher education from around the world.

Still in the planning stages, Universitas 21 is attempting to secure the participation of major U.S. institutions.

Category 3: Virtual Universities

Moving further away from traditional university models, virtual universities make up the third category of new distance education providers. These are online institutions that typically operate without brick-and-mortar campuses. The current private operators of online universities enroll less than 5 percent of all students in postsecondary distance education, although this number is growing rapidly.²³

Perhaps the most successful—and one of the most controversial—of the new virtual institutions is the **University of Phoenix Online** (Table 4). Founded in 1976 by CEO John G. Sperling, Phoenix is the nation’s fastest growing proprietary higher education institution.

The North Central Association of Schools and Colleges (NCA) accredited Phoenix in 1978. From November 1999 to November 2000, Phoenix increased its overall enrollment (both on and off line) from 68,000 to 84,000 students. Although the institution maintains 55 campuses and 98 learning centers in 18 states and abroad, it is best known for its rapidly growing DE component. Phoenix Online, as it is called, has pursued an aggressive growth strategy. Its tracking stock, issued by its parent company, the Apollo Group, raised \$70 million from Wall Street investors on the first day it was offered. Phoenix Online’s enrollment increased 67 percent in the past year, from 11,100 to 18,500 students.²⁴

Geared toward working adults, the University of Phoenix curriculum emphasizes vocational education and goals. Phoenix offers an associate of arts degree in general studies and an associate of arts degree through credit recognition, as well as bachelor’s degrees in business-related subjects and graduate programs in business, management, health care management, nursing, education, counseling and computer information systems. In 1999, Phoenix began offering a doctor of management degree in organizational leadership.

As Phoenix’s online catalog explains, its curriculum “...is designed in cooperation with the business, industry or profession to which the degree program relates.”²⁵ Classes are held on evenings and

Table 4
Virtual Universities

Institution	Characteristics	Number and Type of DE Programs	DE Enrollment	Accreditation
Andrew Jackson University	Correspondence school offering textbook study	3 bachelor's; 3 graduate	400-450	DETC
Capella University	Offers traditional courses and corporate training; partners include Honeywell, Lawson Software	36 certificate; 1 bachelor's; 11 graduate*	1,049*	North Central
Jones International University	First fully accredited online university	21 certificate; 1 bachelor's; 2 graduate	1,500	North Central
Kennedy-Western University	Markets to "mid-career professionals"	13 bachelor's; 12 graduate; 12 Ph.D.	23,000	Not regionally accredited; licensed by Wyoming State Dept. of Ed
University of Phoenix Online	Fastest growing for-profit university; Now 25% online	8 bachelor's; 10 master's; 1 Ph.D.; developing certificate programs	18,500	North Central
Western Governors University	Private university offering menu of courses from other institutions and corporations	3 certificate; 4 bachelor's; 1 graduate*	208*	Candidate for IRAC accreditation

* Figures for 1999-2000, U.S. Department of Education, Report to *Congress on the Distance Education Demonstration Programs*, January 2001. Other statistics reported directly by institutions.

weekends to accommodate adult professionals.

A typical undergraduate course at Phoenix lasts five weeks; graduate courses are six weeks. Students attend one four-hour "workshop" per week or meet for longer sessions on alternate weekends. Students also take classes sequentially—one at a time—so they can better focus on the subject matter while working full-time. An additional requirement is that students work in teams. As Phoenix's online catalog explains,

The university organizes each class into problem-solving teams of the type employed successfully in business and industry. Thus, in addition to the development of intellectual and technical knowledge, the student is able to grow emotionally so that the potential for practical application of knowledge and skill is optimized.²⁶

An estimated 90 percent of Phoenix faculty (both online and classroom) teach part-time. At its Northern California brick-and-mortar campus, Phoenix employs 20 full-time faculty and 550 part-timers. These part-time "facilitators," as they are called, must possess a graduate degree from a regionally accredited institution and must work full-time in a field related to the courses they teach.

They receive training from the university that, in the case of the online faculty, consists of six weeks of online training and five weeks of additional "special instruction and mentoring on how to teach online classes effectively."²⁷

Those with no teaching experience are paired with faculty mentors, who receive part of the new faculty member's salary. Phoenix's part-time "practitioner faculty," as they are also called, are not eligible for tenure or benefits, although they are reimbursed for expenses. The salary average is \$1,200—ranging from \$950 to \$2,000 for an on-site course and from \$900 to \$1,280 for an online course. This depends on the level of the course and the training of the instructor; Phoenix claims that all instructors have full-time employment in the discipline in which they teach.²⁸

Phoenix faculty work in a highly structured environment. Course facilitators in traditional classes are forbidden to lecture. Faculty are, instead, expected to closely follow Phoenix's "teaching/learning model," which begins with course syllabi and detailed teaching modules developed by full-

time faculty on the main campus. In this way, faculty responsibilities are broken down into a series of discrete steps, such as when course development is detached from teaching. Phoenix course modules “include guidelines for weekly assignments, group activities and grading.”²⁹ Some course modules contain classroom time-management guidelines broken down into 15-minute intervals.³⁰

Phoenix defends its practice of using these restrictive guidelines in the name of standardization. The university’s online catalog declares: “The standardized curriculum for each degree program provides students with specified levels of knowledge and skills regardless of the delivery method or classroom location.”³¹

Critics argue, however, that Phoenix’s course modules violate academic freedom because they don’t allow faculty members sufficient discretion. Milton R. Blood, managing director of the American Assembly of the Collegiate Schools of Business, has characterized Phoenix’s standardized curriculum as “McEducation.” He explained, “It’s a redefinition of how we go about delivering higher education. The question is whether it’s really higher education when it’s delivered in a franchised way.”³²

Located in Englewood, Colo., **Jones International University** (Table 4) is the nation’s first fully accredited, exclusively online higher education institution. When JIU was accredited by North Central in March 1999, some 96 percent (54 out of 56) of its faculty members were hired on a part-time basis. JIU, a for-profit subsidiary of Jones International, which is a cable and media firm, uses an instructional model which draws upon many of the same practices found at the University of Phoenix.

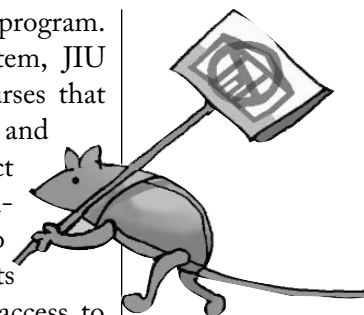
Teaching at JIU, for example, is partitioned into discrete processes, such as course development and instruction. Administrators at Jones International, like Joe Gregg, director of content and product development, contract with faculty at outside institutions, who are known as “content experts,” to create JIU’s courses. The courses are taught by JIU’s almost exclusively part-time “teaching faculty,” who are paid \$600 for a bachelor’s-level course and \$700 for a master’s-level course.

Like Phoenix, the JIU curriculum is geared toward working adults. At the time it was accredited, JIU offered 36 courses and two degree programs (B.A. and M.A.) in business communication. In March 2000, Jones announced the creation of its

fully accredited, exclusively online MBA program. Eschewing the traditional semester system, JIU offers students rolling enrollment in courses that last for 16 or eight (accelerated) weeks and which are based on one hour of contact time per week. Tuition at JIU is approximately \$500 to \$700 per course. With no traditional campus, JIU offers its students the services of an online librarian with access to Internet databases and reference collections. Most JIU students are enrolled in non-degree courses or certificate programs.

North Central’s decision in 1999 to accredit JIU generated considerable controversy. From the perspective of Robert C. Albrecht, chief academic officer at Western Governors University, JIU’s accreditation was important because it “gives more credibility to all virtual institutions.” Critics of NCA’s decision, on the other hand, were outraged. The most widely circulated critique of the NCA action came from the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). James Perley, chair of AAUP’s committee on accrediting, in a letter to the executive director of NCA, cited the lack of full-time faculty members at JIU, who would be expected to shape the curriculum, uphold the quality of teaching and research, and mentor and advise JIU students. Perley also raised objections to JIU’s prepackaged courses, the institution’s one online reference librarian and JIU’s overreliance on part-time faculty. As Perley explained, “By all public accounts, [JIU] presents a very weak case for accreditation. Indeed it embodies most of our major worries about the denigration of quality that could follow this apparently inexorable march toward online education.”³³

At a June 1995 meeting of the Western Governors Association, policymakers discussed the issue of population growth in the West and the potential for rapidly expanding enrollment at regional colleges and universities. In response, the governors created the **Western Governors University** (Table 4), one of the most highly publicized virtual universities created in the past few years. Organized as a joint project of 19 western states and Guam, WGU is a privately owned university that offers courses from a range of outside academic institutions and corporations. In 1997, WGU officials signed collaborative agreements with the British Open University, the Open Learning Agency (British Columbia), Tokai University (Japan) and the Universidad Virtual del Instituto Tecnológico y



de Estudio Superiores de Monterrey (Mexico). These institutions would provide courses for students in pursuit of WGU's competency-based degrees and certificates. In 1998, WGU began offering three degree and certificate programs.

WGU's competency-based education has generated controversy. Under this system, students can gain credits toward their degree or certificate by demonstrating mastery, in lieu of actual coursework, in a particular field. Students can demonstrate their knowledge of a particular field via standardized test, portfolio, research paper or any number of other assessments.³⁴ Theoretically, students could earn an entire degree without actually sitting through even one course.

WGU currently offers competency-based associate of applied science degrees in aspects of instructional technology, associate's and bachelor's degrees in business, and an M.A. in learning and technology. In November 2000, Western Governors University was granted candidate status for accreditation by the Inter-Regional Accrediting Committee (IRAC), which is composed of representatives from four regional accrediting agencies.

WGU claims to have a "distributed" faculty, meaning that the institution does not hire its own teaching faculty and relies on its affiliates. The university Web site reports that "traditional faculty roles" at WGU are "unbundled." According to the WGU Web site, "Program council members oversee the curriculum, assessment council members assure the tests and measures are accurate and effective, and mentors work with students to design the path to achieve their goals."

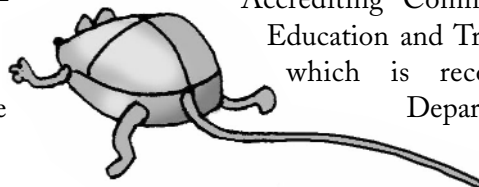
The larger problem at WGU has been low enrollment (the college enrolled only 208 students in 1999-2000), which one analyst attributed to student concerns over the perceived quality of WGU's competency-based degrees and certificates.³⁵ In September 2000, the state of Utah released an audit that criticized WGU for its low enrollment numbers, for withholding information from auditors, and for overcharging students for degree programs in comparison with other regional colleges and universities.³⁶

Capella University (Table 4), based in Minneapolis, is a private, virtual university geared toward adult professionals. Founded in 1993 by CEO Steve Shank, Capella has instituted faculty and student policies that are more in line with existing brick-and-mortar institutions. Although the

large majority of Capella's 170 faculty members work part time, individual faculty, for example, teach their own courses, and the university maintains a maximum of 12 students per course. Capella students, moreover, are required "to interact with one another and with their instructors at least once a week online," a policy designed to alleviate concerns over the lack of meaningful interaction with faculty at other virtual universities. With a current (and rapidly growing) enrollment of 3,000 students, Capella is expected to become profitable by 2002. Capella offers undergraduate degree programs in information technology as well as graduate and Ph.D. programs in business, education, human services and psychology. In April 2000, Capella University was accredited by the North Central Association.³⁷

Other examples of virtual universities include **Kennedy-Western University**, which maintains an office in Cheyenne Wyo. and **Andrew Jackson University**, based in Birmingham Ala. (Table 4). Kennedy-Western markets distance education courses to "mid-career" professionals seeking a degree in business, education or engineering. It was recently highlighted in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* as one of many online institutions that lacked regional accreditation. Licensed only by the Wyoming State Department of Education, Kennedy-Western is barred from enrolling California students and has been contacted by the Oregon attorney general's office for misleading advertising in that state. Robin Dodson, chief academic officer for the Idaho State Board of Education, which also rejected an application by Kennedy-Western, says that many of Kennedy-Western's students are located overseas. The college purports to have offices in Jakarta, Indonesia, as well as Moscow and Singapore.³⁸

Andrew Jackson University has a decidedly low-tech approach toward distance education. Although the institution maintains an up-to-date Web site, its curriculum is based on textbook study. AJU markets itself as the online university for religious home-schooled students. Its teacher-practitioner faculty produces the institution's study guides and course examinations in each degree program. It is unclear whether they have direct contact with students. AJU is accredited by the Accrediting Commission of the Distance Education and Training Council (DETC), which is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as a



national accrediting agency. Formerly known as the National Home Study Council, the DETC accredits more than 70 institutions that offer home study, even though credits from DETC-accredited institutions are not widely accepted at regionally accredited colleges and universities.

Category 4: Corporate University or Training Institutions

Corporate managers have had a long history of involvement in American higher education. Beginning in the late 19th century, many prominent corporations organized in-house training institutes for their workers. Westinghouse created its in-house school in 1888, General Electric in 1901. Generally, the more technologically sophisticated the industry, the greater the chance that corporations would create their own training programs. In 1913, representatives from 34 different firms founded the National Association of Corporation Schools, laying the foundation for what Dan Schiller calls a “shadow system” of corporate post-secondary education in the United States.

By 1980, there were hundreds of corporate universities in existence. Today, according to Jeanne Meister, president of the Corporate University Xchange, there are more than 2,000 corporate universities worldwide. These include corporate training schools that have existed for many years, such as the ITT Technical Institute, Sylvan Learning Systems or DeVry, as well as a legion of recent startups and new exclusively distance education providers such as Smartforce, Skillsoft and Digital-think, and infrastructure providers Saba and Docent.

Another prominent example of a new and expanding corporate content provider is Click2learn, founded by Microsoft co-founder Paul Alan. Click2learn maintains a very large catalog of online courses for business and professional training, and it has an extensive corporate, university and gov-

ernment agency client list. Today, the average corporate university is four years old, has an annual budget of \$15 million, employs 79 full-time employees and delivers 23 percent of the corporation's annual training via DE.³⁹ Corporations have increasingly utilized DE for training needs because it makes travel and accommodations unnecessary. According to *Training* magazine, hotel and travel costs make up two-thirds of the total cost of corporate training annually.⁴⁰

With the advent of DE and the centralization of corporate training and executive development departments within separate institutions, some corporate universities have reached the point of being nearly indistinguishable from other, for-profit online business schools. Motorola University, one of the largest corporate schools, perhaps best illustrates this blurring of once-clear boundaries. With a faculty of 400 full-time instructors and 800 part-time contract teachers, and a “student body” of 100,000 workers per year, the accredited Motorola U. rivals large state universities in size, reach and budget.⁴¹

The rise of the corporate university phenomenon has impacted traditional higher education in immeasurable ways. The explosion of corporate universities has provided opportunities for faculty members as instructors and content providers. Many corporate universities have formed partnerships with existing higher education institutions as method of gaining access to the educational “seal of approval” offered by regional or national accrediting agencies. Although some corporate universities have begun directly competing with traditional colleges and universities and offering courses to the general public, only a few have undertaken the arduous task of applying for accreditation. The Rand Graduate School of Policy Studies, for example, is accredited by the Western Association of Colleges and Schools. Likewise, the Arthur D. Little School of Management is accredited by the New England Association of Colleges and Schools. In either case, it is the institution and not the cor-

Analysis and Conclusions

As this report demonstrates clearly, the pace of distance education is accelerating, and it is likely to occupy a growing part of the landscape in higher education. But if the report signals expansion, it also demonstrates that *the way distance education is being organized and conducted* may pose serious questions. Much of the distance education described in these pages, whether non-profit or for-profit, is built on ideas drawn from the corporate sector about consumer focus, product standardization, tight personnel control and cost-effectiveness (that is, to maximize course taking while minimizing the “inputs” of faculty and development time).

These ideas, oriented to the corporate world, do not reflect the traditional model of higher education decision-making which emphasizes faculty independence in teaching and research, academic control of the curriculum, academic freedom in the classroom and collegial decision-making. We are not suggesting that corporate ideas are always wrong or that the way things have always been done is the way they should be done forever. However, we strongly believe that broad academic content, high standards, personal interaction and professional control are the key elements of educational quality. Academic decision-making processes have done a good job of producing these elements of quality—the best in the world—and we are concerned that some of the trends and practices described in the preceding sections may inhibit rather than promote the basics of good education.

AFT quality principles and distance education

The importance of maintaining educational quality has been AFT’s primary message since distance education emerged as a major issue in the mid-1990s. In 1996, the AFT published its first report on the subject, *Teaming Up with Technology*, which alerted unions to the necessity of involving themselves in all aspects of DE decision-making. The report urged unions to focus their involvement around four key questions: Does the technology make sense educationally? Does it make sense financially? Do students and faculty all have access to new technologies and know how to use them? Are faculty and staff rights protected? A number of reports analyzing distance education trends followed.

In 2000, AFT deepened its involvement with the publication of *Distance Education: Guidelines for Good Practice* which offers a set of 14 benchmarks for achieving quality in the distance environment. A summary of the *Guidelines* appears on page 19. AFT believes that excellent distance education can take place under any organizational structure—public and private institutions, even the newer profit-making models—if these guidelines are scrupulously observed. In fact, faculty members nationwide today are conducting distance courses of the highest quality. It was the experience and advice of DE faculty that shaped AFT’s standards focused on strong academic content, interaction and professional control. The problem, however, is

Distance Education: Guidelines for Good Practice

Below are the 14 Standards for distance education included in the Guidelines. These standards are based on a survey of 200 distance education practitioners in AFT higher education locals.

1. Faculty Must Retain Academic Control
2. Faculty Must Be Prepared To Meet the Special Requirements of Teaching at a Distance
3. Course Design Should Be Shaped to the Potentials of the Medium
4. Students Must Fully Understand Course Requirements and Be Prepared To Succeed
5. Close Personal Interaction Must Be Maintained
6. Class Size Should Be Set through Normal Faculty Channels
7. Courses Should Cover All Material
8. Experimentation with a Broad Variety of Subjects Should Be Encouraged
9. Equivalent Research Opportunities Must Be Provided
10. Student Assessment Should Be Comparable
11. Equivalent Advisement Opportunities Must Be Offered
12. Faculty Should Retain Creative Control over Use and Re-Use of Materials
13. Full Undergraduate Degree Programs Should Include Same-Time Same Place Coursework
14. Evaluation of Distance Coursework Should Be Undertaken at all Levels

that a number of serious questions and concerns arise when we measure our quality principles against many practices outlined in the previous pages. Here are some of those issues.

Questions about DE trends and practices

1. The marketplace and the curriculum: Most of the models outlined in this report emphasize meeting immediate market demands for coursework as well as treating students primarily as “customers.” It is entirely appropriate to consider student and industry preferences in designing curricula, particularly in the corporate training arena. However, we believe that the pre-eminent perspective should be that of academic professionals rather than the marketplace. One concern is that the pure “student as consumer” model rests on the questionable assumption that student-consumers know what they want when they begin an educational program and can confidently decide what courses will lead to the desired educational “product.” Another concern is that broad-based liberal arts coursework, as well as high academic standards, could take a back seat if market models become dominant.

2. Technological capabilities and the curriculum: In one of the stories cited earlier, a distance education advocate explained that professors will have to curb their lectures in order to fit their ideas into a 256-character dialogue box. This raises serious questions. Technological capabilities and limitations should not be the primary factor driving the curriculum and research required of distance education students, rather than the rich interplay among research, curriculum and good pedagogy.

3. Faculty decision-making: To ensure that academic decisions are made for academic reasons, a key characteristic of quality in distance education is ensuring that faculty are in control of shaping and approving courses and integrating them into a coherent curriculum. This is the number one item in AFT’s *Guidelines for Good Practice*. Another basic precept is academic freedom; an individual faculty member should have the authority to determine how the class will be taught.

We are concerned, however, that many of the programs described above appear to keep authority to develop course content confined to a very narrow circle. Some models directly challenge the idea of academic freedom in the classroom. For example, at

the University of Phoenix, we saw that course “facilitators” (they are not called teachers) not only are forbidden to lecture, but also must follow detailed teaching modules.

4. Disaggregation: Many of the institutions reviewed here are moving to a model of curriculum development and teaching that “unbundles” the many roles of the faculty member. A process that has traditionally been maintained from start to finish by the individual faculty member is being parted into specializations—curriculum developers, content deliverers, assessment specialists, etc. This can be seen most starkly in movements such as “The National Learning Infrastructure Initiative” (NLII) created in 1994 by Educom (now Educause), a coalition of technology corporations, public and private colleges and universities and higher education organizations.

Specifically, the NLII would increase student access through the construction of a broadband network modeled on the Internet. The program would be characterized by self-paced study instead of academic calendars, fixed class meetings or a traditional curriculum. Students would pursue their studies via new instructional software that breaks down complex subjects into individual components or modules.

In 1996, Educom released a report on “The Virtual University,” which envisions the resulting new role for faculty and the benefits for the institution.

[In the virtual university], the many roles previously combined in a single faculty member are now disaggregated. Faculty may specialize as developers of courses and courseware wherein they move from being content experts to being a combination of content expert, learning-process design expert, and process-implementation manager; as presenters of that material; as expert assessors of learning and competencies; as advisors; or as specialists in other evolving roles.⁴³

In this view, one of the main advantages of the NLII is that it would “reduce faculty intervention, thereby containing costs.”⁴⁴ As Massy and Zemsky explain:

Workstations don’t get tenure, and delegations are less likely to wait on the provost when particular equipment items are “laid off.” The “retraining” of IT equipment (for example, reprogramming), while not inexpensive, is easier and more predictable than training a tenured professor.⁴⁵

As our report indicates, many providers in all four categories have embraced this vision to differing extents, but the AFT believes this is not the

best route to quality. Quoting directly from the AFT *Guidelines*: A number of studies have demonstrated the importance to student learning of establishing a feedback loop between classroom teaching, curriculum development and scholarly research. That loop becomes inoperative when teaching faculty operate from workbooks based on a prefabricated curriculum that the faculty member has little role in developing, a curriculum that was not shaped directly by the practitioner's experience in teaching these classes or conducting research on these subjects. Students deserve teachers who know all the nuances of what they are teaching and who can exercise professional judgment and academic freedom in doing so.

5. Course standardization: Many of the providers outlined above are attracted to the idea of creating consistent and transferable courses by utilizing course management software and course development specialists. The idea is that an institution or set of institutions can make all of their courses have the same look and feel, and that courses can and should be designed for longevity and transferability. If course management software such as Web CT or Blackboard simply provide faculty with greater technical support and facilitate the faculty member's pedagogy, then they will be powerful teaching aids. But standardization in programming and teaching is the wrong way to go; academic good practice requires a faculty with differing points of view and presentation styles, free-wheeling discussion and academic freedom.

6. Class Size: AFT's distance education practitioners report that good DE generally requires more teacher preparation time than a traditional class as well as more time devoted to interacting with students (through e-mail, chat rooms, etc.) Therefore, it is important to maintain a workable class size. The concern, however, is that commercially minded DE will expand class sizes too greatly in order to maximize enrollments. The move on the part of some providers to concentrate on offering high-enrollment introductory courses (such as introductory psychology) is of particular concern because DE practitioners tell us the students best suited to succeed in a distance education environment are not the newcomers but those who are more mature, better prepared and able to work independently.

Increasing class size is an integral part of the Pew grants at Rio Salado College cited earlier. Introductory algebra, which had the third highest

enrollment of the top 25 courses in the district, was selected for redesign. Course content was delivered via interactive software. The restructuring increased the student/faculty ratio from 35 to 100 students per instructor, although each faculty member was assigned teaching assistants to help with technology questions, and students had access to a help desk.⁴⁶ AFT's *Guidelines* recommend that class size be established through normal faculty channels, with a view to maintaining a high level of interactivity. "Given the time commitment involved in teaching through distance education," say the *Guidelines*, "smaller class size should be considered, particularly at the inception of a new course."

7. "Outcomes" and Class Time: Some providers cited in the previous chapter shift more of the educational assessment to "outcomes." The Western Governors University emphasis on "proficiencies" is the most extreme version of this shift. A greater emphasis on outcomes may be warranted, but a critical question remains: Will an exclusive focus on measurable outputs shortchange the importance of *process* and interactivity in higher education?

Distance education advocates often deride what they call "seat time"—the practice of requiring students to be together and work together for periods of time before passing their courses. Under their theory, if a student can demonstrate "competencies," it should not matter how much time is spent achieving these competencies. The AFT, however, believes that deep knowledge of a subject is not simply a matter of passing a competency test. It does in fact require time—time in the same room or in cyberspace—with teachers and other students chewing over ideas, hearing contrary points of view and defending conclusions. There is reason for concern if time on task comes to be viewed as a luxury rather than a necessity in DE on the corporate model.

8. Same-time, same-place interaction: There is no denying that rich interaction can take place in distance education classes, but we believe it is equally untenable to argue that same-time, same-place interaction has no legitimate role in an undergraduate education. We believe distance education should utilize every available opportunity to bring students and faculty together at some time during an academic program. Our concern is that providing such opportunities does not appear to be a consideration for most of the providers we have stud-

ied. It is particularly troubling to have no same-time, same-place interchange through an entire undergraduate program. AFT faculty who teach by distance education have reported to the union that they believe same-time, same-place interaction should be part of any undergraduate program. In fact, more than 70 percent say that no more than half of a full undergraduate program should be delivered via distance education.

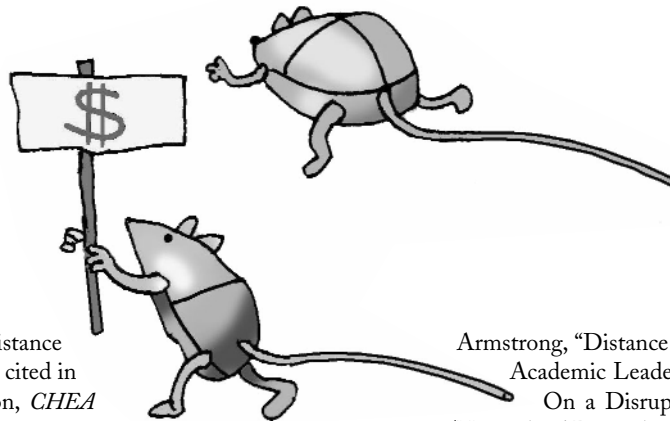
In conclusion, it is proper, even necessary, for higher education faculty to make distance education work, but that may often mean contradicting current DE practice to affirm academic values. Faculty must mobilize behind the principle that democratic governance rather than top-down management produces better, more credible education. Faculty must ensure that college degrees are awarded in the context of a coordinated curriculum with broad-based content. Faculty must see to it that students have the equipment, training and support to succeed in the distance education environment and that they have appropriate academic counseling. Faculty must make the case that time *does* matter—that education is not simply a matter of passing a competency test but, whether in the same room or far apart, being with other teachers and students chewing over ideas, hearing contrary points of view and

defending conclusions. Faculty must assert and find ways to implement the notion that same-time, same-place interchange is an important part of a college education. Faculty must always affirm the importance of free exchange of ideas.

In short, faculty must insist on sound practice based on a broad vision of education—one that recognizes education is about more than facts, more than competencies, more than career ambitions—the things that can be easily “sold.” Education is about broadening one’s intellectual horizons, learning to rely on facts and reason rather than on prejudices when confronting life issues. It is about learning to listen to others and defend ideas by the force of argument. It is about learning respect and acquiring openmindedness, and as such, education is the foundation of a working democracy.

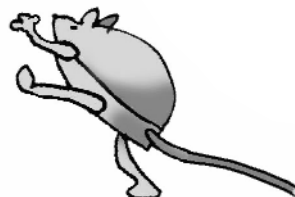
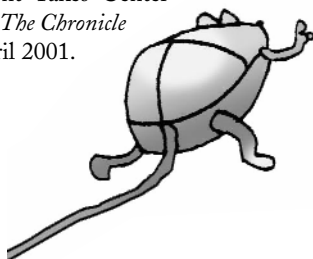
Distance education can make an important contribution toward achieving these goals if it is organized around practices such as those in AFT’s *Distance Education: Guidelines for Good Practice*. However, no one should imagine that implementing these guidelines will be easy in a world where the promise of big dollars and big enrollments constantly beckons. AFT and its members, other organizations representing the faculty and, of course, individual faculty members themselves, will have to be prepared to take up the charge for quality.

Endnotes



- ¹ International Data Corporation, "Online Distance Learning in Higher Education, 1998-2002," cited in Council for Higher Education Accreditation, *CHEA Update* Number 2, (June 1999), 1.
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